

Amusing software real time-wasters

There's lots of silly software that I call "playware" on the market these days, and some of it might tempt you into thinking it would make a great Christmas gift. But take my advice. Steer clear of these offerings.

I tried two programs that claim to provide insights into people's personalities. Both turned out to be shams. And when you consider that each one costs nearly \$50 a copy, they become downright rip-offs.

The programs are Dr. Shrink, marketed by Neuralytic Systems, 66 Bovet Road, San Mateo, Calif. 94402, (800) 323-1776, and Mind-Viewer — billed as "the ultimate in personality software" — from Provocative Software, 189 Airport Road, Burlingame, Calif. 94010, (800) 346-4227.

The two are remarkably similar. Indeed, they are almost identical with different packaging. Mind-Viewer claims to "reveal anyone's true nature," while Dr. Shrink claims to reveal how someone you know through a personal or business relationship actually thinks. Each says it will tell you another's



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result is insipid.

After spending nearly half an hour inputting answers to questions, Dr. Shrink gives you a six-line output that purports to rate the subject on scales of one to 10 for drive, reliability, sociability, cleverness, emotionality and aggressiveness. That's all it does! I guess the programmer didn't read the promotional material.

MindViewer does — or rather, doesn't do — the same things. So much for secret sex fantasies!

Here are more silly software packages you should be sure to avoid as you plan your Christmas

most intimate dreams and fantasies, including, of course, their top-secret sex fantasies.

If this concept were truly well-executed, it might be worth something. But in both cases, the

list:

■ Footprints in History, from Salinon Corp., 7424 Greenville Ave., Dallas 75231, (800) 722-0054, is certainly less stupid than the two programs discussed above. But even though it costs just \$39.95, it's hardly more useful. Footprints takes any sets of dates from 1850 to the present, and fills in the spaces with other notable historical events.

First, it took me more than an hour to get this thing up and running. Second, you have to give it more than one date to work from: Your daughter's birthday alone won't generate any footsteps. Third, the result is only marginally interesting and hardly valuable.

■ Special Days is another Salinon offering for the same price that, in my opinion, has about the same worth. By entering a birth date, Special Days tells you famous people born that day, others born that year, what certain items cost that year, along with a sampling of the hit songs.

I created some of these lists for my family members. Their reac-

tion and mine? Big deal! But I must say, with these two packages the value really is in the mind of the beholder. You may know a history buff who would find this sort of thing worthwhile, but I doubt it.

■ Last, beware of Off The Wall, a third Salinon product, also \$39.95. It's billed as a "stress-reliever" that allows you to create humorous sayings about anyone who's getting under your skin.

This is truly off the wall, and something you shouldn't open your wallet for either.

■ The bottom line: Whether you're looking for personality software or something of a different nature to generate some playfulness with your computer, watch out for these "gift ideas." In general, they're poorly executed and just plain silly, and at worst they're outright rip-offs.

Hillel Segal's column includes evaluations of gadgets, seminars and books designed to enhance business productivity. Segal is a management consultant based in Boulder.